

## Message Text

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APPROVED BY THE SECRETARY

NEA: A.L.ATHERTON,JR.

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS NIACT IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

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NODIS

FOR AMBASSADOR MURPHY FROM SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SY, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: DAMASCUS 1445, 1446

1. YOUR REPORT OF YOUR CONVERSATION WITH SHIHABI IS DISTURBING BUT FOR THE TIME BEING - OR UNTIL WE HAVE OTHER EVIDENCE BEYOND THAT VOLUNTEERED BY SHIHABI THAT SYRIANS MAY BE CONSIDERING SENDING IN REGULAR TROOPS TO LEBANON - I PREFER TO HOLD USE OF A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO ASAD IN RESERVE. I WOULD LIKE YOU, HOWEVER, TO SEE ASAD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, SAYING YOU ARE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM ME TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION IN LEBANON.

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2. ALTHOUGH THE PURPOSE OF YOUR MEETING IS TO ASCERTAIN

HIS FUTURE INTENTIONS, YOU SHOULD MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION IN TERMS OF OUR WISH TO SHARE OUR THOUGHTS ON THE DIFFICULT SITUATION IN LEBANON. YOU SHOULD EXPLAIN OUR ASSESSMENT AS FOLLOWS:

(A) WE ARE CONCERNED AT NEW INCREASE IN TENSIONS IN LEBANON. THE SITUATION MAY ONCE AGAIN BE AT A TURNING-POINT, WITH THE KEY BEING A RESOLUTION OF THE QUESTION OF FRANGIE. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE LEBANESE POLITICIANS MAY BE ON THE VERGE OF FRAMING A FACE-SAVING FORMULA ALLOWING FRANGIE TO STEP DOWN IN THE PRETENSE THAT IT HAS BEEN IN ACCORD WITH THE CONSTITUTION. THIS IS A PECULIARLY LEBANESE PROBLEM, AND WE THINK PATIENCE IS REQUIRED WHILE THE LEBANESE DEVISE A PECULIARLY LEBANESE SOLUTION.

(B) WE HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED WITH THE SUPPORT FOR FRANGIE'S OUSTER THAT HAS DEVELOPED AMONG THE HIGH MILITARY LEADERSHIP, AMONG MUSLIM SUNNIS AND SHIAS, AND THE YOUNGER CHRISTIAN LEADERS. EVEN THE HOLD-OUTS SUCH AS JUMBLATT AND CHAMOUN SHOW NO REAL ENTHUSIASM FOR KEEPING FRANGIE IN OFFICE.

(C) THE DEMORALIZATION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY IS OF COURSE DISTURBING, BUT THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF EVIDENCE THAT TOP MILITARY LEADERS ARE DETERMINED TO EFFECT A WORKABLE RECONCILIATION WITH THE DISSIDENTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, ALLOWING SOME RESTORATION OF THE MILITARY'S EFFECTIVENESS AS A LEBANESE INSTITUTION.

(D) SYRIA HAS PLAYED A CAUTIOUS AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN LEBANON IN BRINGING ABOUT THE CEASE-FIRE AND LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION WHICH HAS BEEN WIDELY ACCEPTED BY VIRTUALLY ALL LEBANESE FACTIONS. THAT IS AN IMPRESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT THAT STILL PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR A LONG-RUN DOMESTIC POLITICAL SOLUTION.

3. AFTER GOING OVER THIS GROUND, AND IF YOU CONSIDER IT USEFUL, YOU SHOULD ASK ASAD WHETHER THERE IS ANY WAY WE CAN BE HELPFUL TO HIS AIM OF RESTORING STABILITY TO THE LEBANESE SCENE, AN OBJECTIVE WHICH WE SHARE. YOU MAY TELL SECRET

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HIM THAT WE RESPECT AND VALUE HIS VIEWS AND WOULD GIVE THE MOST SYMPATHETIC CONSIDERATION TO ANY OF HIS SUGGESTIONS. YOU SHOULD DRAW HIM OUT ON HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND WHAT HE INTENDS TO DO IN THE FUTURE.

4. IF ASAD REVEALS THAT HE IS INDEED CONSIDERING SENDING SYRIAN REGULARS INTO LEBANON, YOU SHOULD SAY ON MY BEHALF THAT THIS WOULD CARRY THE MOST SERIOUS RISKS OF WAR. WE

WOULD WELCOME ASAD'S THOUGHTS ABOUT ALTERNATIVES TO SO DANGEROUS A COURSE. YOU COULD SAY THAT WE APPRECIATE HE HAS A MAJOR STAKE IN THE LEBANESE SITUATION AND IS CLOSER TO IT THAN WE ARE, BUT WE FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO GIVE HIM OUR JUDGMENT OF THE RISK OF WIDER WAR IN THE AREA INHERENT IN ANY MOVE BY SYRIAN REGULARS. YOU SHOULD ALSO TELL HIM WE ARE IN TOUCH WITH ISRAEL ABOUT THE DANGERS IN THE SITUATION AND TO URGE RESTRAINT. KISSINGER

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